and consists ordinarily of a kitchen, occupying the greater part of the rectangle, and a second room, behind the hearth and chimney which occupy most of one end of the kitchen. There are sometimes one or two bedrooms at the opposite end of the kitchen, in addition. In East Clare this type of house is common, but there is also a squarer type which may have a second story.

The tiny peasant cabins dating from the last century are of the West Clare type; they were and are single-gabled, rectangular blocks of one or two rooms, with steep, thatched roofs and a single half-door on each side. The half-doors open directly out of the kitchen, the one to the windward kept closed. The modern stone cottages erected by the governmental agencies and patterned after those built first by the Congested Districts Board (1893–1923) are slated and weatherproofed. Except for additional four rooms, they represent the same pattern. It is impossible to give a statistical statement of the occurrence of this type of house or to correlate its numbers with those of the small farm families, but housing records show that 36 per cent of Clare's population live in three-room dwellings, 24 per cent in four-room dwellings, and 12 per cent in two-room dwellings, which seems to point to a fairly close correspondence between the proportion of small farm population to total population.

In the small farmer's house of this type, the kitchen is the seat of family life. In it are the hearth, at which cooking is done, the table around which the family – first the adult males, then the women and children – eat, the kitchen utensils, and the religious shrine of the "Blessed Lamp" and the Sacred Heart picture before which the family prays the "Family Rosary" at night. Here also is the "dresser" found in nearly every small farmer's house, a sideboard filled with fancy china and porcelain used only for family festivals and to give to marrying relatives. The family will part

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

CHAPTER VII.

THE IRISH PEASANT HOUSE.

342

The Irish peasant house consists of a low single-storied rectangle, some 12 to 15 feet wide internally but of varying length, customarily thatched and whitewashed; but this generalised description embraces a surprising range of styles. So much abuse has been levelled at the Irish cabin that it is well to recall the opinion of a Swedish scientist who writes as follows:—"Lacking nearly every architectural consciousness and at the same time every kind of imported building material, the Irish peasant house never stands out in bold relief against its background but melts into it even as a tree or rock. Whenever the old building traditions are faithfully maintained its features are of a fine simplicity. The best Irish thatching gives the finest peasant roof in Europe."

342
362
511

The other side of the picture is the dirt and smells inseparable from the long habits of close association with livestock, so that within living memory, "cows and calves, men, women and children, horse and poultry were herded together in one apartment." Poverty and the rack-rent system have been blamed for this, but behind it lie facts of ethnology which are rooted in the remote past. Local authorities are striving to wipe away the stigma of the old order, and are spreading a "rash" of red-roofed cottages over the fair face of the country, but there is still a great mass of material for study.

[p. 57]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

342 beauty which vary subtly from one region to another in response to local climates, conditions and contacts. The use of local building materials meant that they fitted into landscapes of which they were literally a part, their clay or stone walls gathered from the earth on the spot, their timbers dug from the bogs, their thatch harvested from the fields. A Swedish ethnographer writes that 'the best Irish thatching gives the finest peasant roof in Europe.'[1] The result of an unbroken tradition was a fine simplicity of style and proportions, with nothing of the vulgar obtrusiveness of the new fashions in country houses, based too often on urban styles and red-brick respectability. Before the famine, houses in the market towns also were very largely of traditional local style save in the central square. Isaac Weld, describing Roscommon in 1832, states that out of its 517 houses no less than 462 were thatched.[2]

342 Our concern is with the old-style house as a shelter for man and beast and as the vehicle of family lore and regional tradition.
●362 In the crowded clachans limitations of space and the fact that
231 diarying was mainly practised in the summer booleys go far to explain the absence of separate byres or dairies. Sanitation was of the crudest and closets unknown. It is these aspects of Irish rural life that have most readily aroused the amused indignation of the critics and the defensive wrath of Irish patriots. As we read in an earlier description of the Western Isle:[3]

> At one of th' ends he kept his cows,
> At th'other end he kept his spouse.

The custom of housing man and beast together has been very general among pastoral peoples in regions of difficult climate, whether in Highland Britain or the European mountain zone. Parts of Ireland, however, have long had a different type of house giving more family privacy: in the lowland parts of Leinster, East Munster and South Ulster the house with central chimney and fireside partition did not easily allow of the keeping of livestock in the house, and one is inclined to regard

[1] Åke Campbell, *Folk-Liv.* (1937), 228.
[2] Isaac Weld, *Roscommon* (1832), 307.
[3] W(illiam) M(offatt), *A Description of the Western Isle*, Dublin (1724), Canto 2.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

this style as an improvement introduced by English settlers. This central-chimney house with its 'jamb-wall' hearth will be described in the following chapter. In any event, although stray hens, a pet lamb or a farrowing pig may occasionally join the cats and dogs in an Irish kitchen, the keeping of cattle in the house is a thing of the past. Yet it was so recently practised, especially along the Atlantic seaboard, that many existing houses are not far removed from kitchen-byres, a cross partition conveniently converting the byre into a bedroom, store or dairy.

Moreover the shape and internal arrangements of the prevailing pattern of traditional rural dwelling are conditioned by these antecedents. The long rectangular shape was sanctioned by custom and preserved by superstition; a house, to be 'lucky', must not be more than one room wide (Fig. 8). 'Widen the house', I have heard it said in Donegal, 'and the family will get smaller'. The hearth gable of the house was, where possible, dug into the slope of rising ground, so that it would have been difficult to enlarge the house by widening it: it could grow more easily in length. The long shape is also characteristic of humble dwellings in the small straggling Irish towns. Their streets are lined by whitewashed cabins strung end to end interminably; in the 'cabin suburbs' one rarely sees a house that is not aligned along the road. Describing Ballymoney in Co. Antrim about 1830 the Ordnance Survey Letters state that many houses facing the main street had no access to the byres and stables behind, so that cows and horses had to be taken in and out through the house. In parts of western Ireland cows were brought into single-roomed houses within living memory. In Clare Island, Co. Mayo, there were at the turn of the century only five or six houses out of the total of 120 into which the cattle and pigs were not taken at night.[1] Writing of the village of Kilgever near Westport in 1880 an observer states: 'It is a terrible thought that these huge heaps (of manure about the doorsteps) had all been taken from the single rooms, each of which formed a common stye for men, women, children, horses, cows, pigs and poultry.[2]' It is still characteristic of many small farms that the manure heap is not far from the

[1]C. R. Browne, *Clare Island and Inishturk*.
[2]J. H. Tuke, *A Visit to Donegal and Connaught in the Spring of 1880* (1888), 54

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

342 front door, for the cows are kept in a byre which is a continuation of the dwelling house, an obvious convenience though there
362 is not, as in the longhouse of Wales and Dartmoor, direct
231 access from kitchen to feeding-walk.

342
353

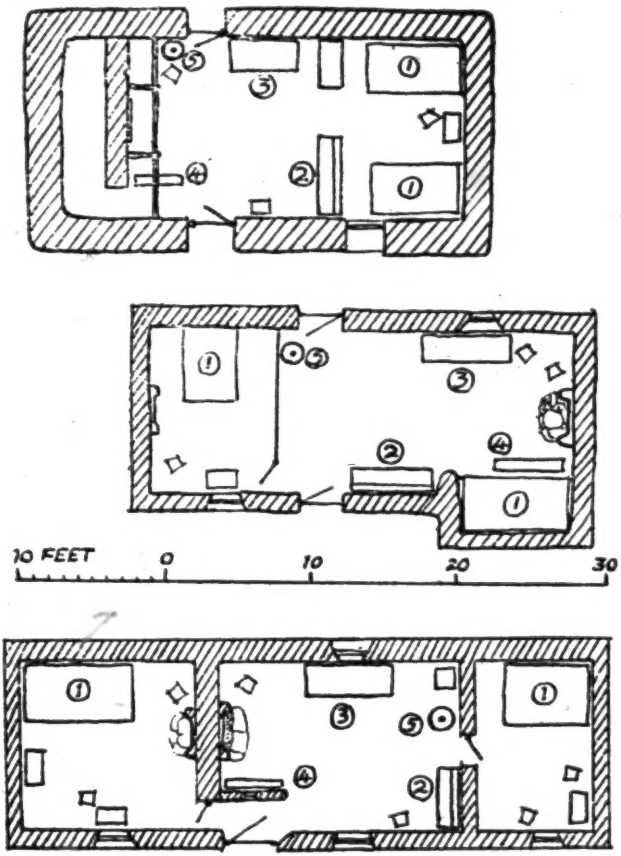

FIG. 8. House plans. *Above:* hipped-roof house, Co. Galway (compare Fig. 13, 2). *Centre:* house with outshot, Co. Donegal (compare Fig. 12, 3). *Below:* house with jamb-wall, Co. Down. (1) bed, (2) dresser, (3) table, (4) bench, (5) churn.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Poverty and rack-renting undoubtedly contributed to the long survival of such conditions, but they ultimately derive from cultural forces of wide distribution and high antiquity. It used to be said in defence of the custom of sharing the house with the cow that she helped to keep the house warm and that in turn the cow yielded more milk. Inquire further and you will find that it was thought to be unlucky if the cow was not able to get a glimpse of the fire. Behind this belief there lies faith in the power of the fire to dispel evil spirits. The end of the house farthest from the hearth is commonly referred to as the 'bottom-end', a relic of the time when it housed the cattle, for it was obviously wise to have the floor sloping down towards the byre. Many cabins and huts were constructed as lean-tos against a bog-face or an old fence (ditch). Hence the saying applied, for example, to the Cappagh district of Co. Armagh, that 'you can't cross a ditch or you'll fall down a chimney'. It should be recalled that in Ireland the tenants built and repaired their own houses with, normally, no assistance from the landlord, and there was little inducement to build houses to last longer than the lease of say twenty-one years. Only in Ulster under the custom of tenant right could outgoing tenants claim recompense from the new tenants for improvements made.

The simple rectangular shape is a feature of west European house-types from prehistoric times and has characterized some houses of Neolithic age excavated in Ireland. Such houses were usually built of timber, clay or sods (scraws). Circular or oval houses are of similar antiquity, whether made of stone or of wattles, but although a few round-ended rectangular houses survive, the round hut of corbelled stone slabs is used today only as a store place or animal house (Chapter IX). The houses of Achill Island are described by several writers about 1840 as circular or oval in shape, built of boulders without mortar and having the thatched roof continuous with the walls. They had neither chimneys nor windows, and the single door was sometimes not more than four feet high. None of these houses is now inhabited though their ruins can be seen. The round or oval house, however, has probably contributed to certain features of the traditional rectangular-house in some areas, for example the central hearth and the hipped roof which is proper